

UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT

# Memorandum

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3/17/81 SOC 11-2  
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DC 071 R

TO : The Files (SOC 11-2)  
THRU: POLCOUNS - John F. King JK  
FROM : POL - Townsend B. Friedman

DATE: March 17, 1981

SUBJECT: A Talk with Colonel Antonio Fichera

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- ENTIRE TEXT.

I saw Colonel Antonio Fichera, Sub-Secretary of the Presidency, March 16 to thank him for his cooperation in clearing up the disappearance of Piñon and Magnini. Fichera made no bones about his belief that some official agency of the GOA was involved (though he refused to speculate which); that the act was terribly unfortunate, particularly in terms of Viola's trip to the States; and that he considers the Embassy and the Presidency "allies" in trying to clear up such events. He also said that "we are wondering if there is not some connection" between the arrests of the CELS activists, the 'inexplicable' arrests of the Mothers and the last disappearances. He abruptly dropped this speculation, preferring to stick to the line that the Piñon-Magnini disappearance was the work of some low-ranking, unthinking security types.

Fichera also made a number of other comments of interest:

- Bemoaning the difficulties of his job (he is in an especially downbeat mood as a result of a bad cold), he said that the politics of the current economic situation are especially painful to him and others in the Presidency. He explained that there is an effort to make the Viola team appear like saviours on the economic front who promise to change everything and blame the old team for all of the economy's ills. He said there is much wrong, but there is also an effort to ignore the achievements of the past three years. He said with some emotion, "they are acting like people who are going to come in here and walk

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all over us, blaming us for what has gone on. We will not accept that." After unburdening himself, he refused to make a clear statement of who "they" are. Originally it sounded as if he was talking about Viola's people. Then he said that it was all the work of a press campaign designed to show differences that in fact do not exist between the incoming and outgoing teams.

- We talked a bit about how it is to work in the Presidency. He complained that a "four-headed" government is very difficult to operate. It is especially difficult for him to deal with the Army since he is going to have to one day return there and make his career there. But he also has to be loyal to the President. He agreed that the Presidency has a good deal less independence today than it did about a year ago, attributing this to a vague phenomenon of "ups and downs" in presidential independence. (I think it may have more to do with the relationship between the President and the Army Commander. At one time, this Embassy used to talk about the Viola-Videla government when the former was Army CINC and the latter President. For a period early last year, the new Army CINC (Galtieri) was just breaking into his job and establishing his authority. This gave Videla more wiggle room. As Galtieri got used to the position and learned where the levers were, Videla's power declined, perhaps more so after last December's command changes. The great Junta debate over the Beagle displayed where the balance now lies -- with the Army in any test. Videla wanted to accept the mediation with only minor changes. The Army did not. It won. The action officer at the Army's Secretary General, Colonel Zambonini, once spent half-an-hour describing how the Army --supported by the Navy--pulled the Junta around to its position on the Beagle.)

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-- Fichera said he will be staying on in the  
Presidency in his present position for  
another year at least.

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